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How to Buy BEEF STEAKS



U.S. DEPARTMENT OF AGRICULTURE

How to Buy BEEF STEAKS



A tender, juicy steak is a mealtime favorite of millions of Americans. To make sure that **your** steak will be tender and juicy, you need to know something about both buying the beef and cooking it.

Many different cuts of beef are called "steaks"—and any one of these cuts can vary in quality, depending upon the kind of carcass from which it came. But all are nutritious and all can provide good eating if properly prepared. The secret lies in suiting the cooking method to the grade and the cut you select.

About Beef Quality

Beef varies in quality more than any other kind of meat. But you don't have to learn to judge beef quality for yourself. USDA grades are a reliable guide to meat quality—its tenderness, juiciness, and flavor. The grades are based on nationally uniform Federal standards of quality and are applied by USDA graders. Therefore, you can be sure that a USDA Choice porterhouse steak, for example, will provide the same good eating no matter where or when you buy it.

How Beef is Graded

Meat grading is a voluntary service provided by USDA's Consumer and Marketing Service to meat packers and others who request it and pay a fee for the service. So not all meat is graded, although a large percentage of it is.

USDA graders, who are highly trained in meat quality, grade only whole carcasses or wholesale cuts. This is because quality differences are dif-

ficult, or impossible, to recognize in the smaller retail cuts. When the carcass is graded, a purple shield-shaped grademark containing the letters USDA and the grade name—such as Prime, Choice, or Good—is applied with a roller-stamp. The grade shield is rolled on, in a long ribbon-like imprint, all along the length of the carcass and across both shoulders. Then when the carcass is divided into retail cuts, one or more of the grade-marks will appear on most of these cuts.

Only meat which has first passed a strict inspection for wholesomeness may be graded. So you may be sure when you see the grademark that the meat came from a healthy animal and was processed in a sanitary plant.

Inspection for Wholesomeness



All meat processed in plants which sell their products across State lines must, under Federal law, be inspected for wholesomeness. This service is another provided by USDA's Consumer and Marketing Service. USDA meat inspectors also supervise the cleanliness and operating procedures of meat packing plants to assure that meat is not contaminated or adulterated.

Meat which passes the USDA inspection for wholesomeness is stamped with a round mark which bears the legend "U.S. INSP'D & P'S'D." This mark is placed only once on wholesale cuts. So you are likely to see it only on large cuts of meat—seldom on steaks. Packaged meat foods, however, such as frozen dinners and canned meats, are required to carry the inspection mark on the label if they are to be sold in interstate commerce.

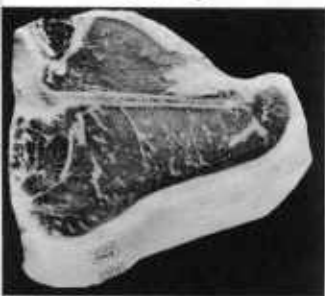
Learn to recognize both the inspection mark—a circle—and the grademark—a shield. Remember they mean different things. The inspection mark tells you that the meat is **clean** and **wholesome**. The grademark tells you the **quality** of the meat.

LOOK FOR THE GRADE

Each USDA beef grade is a measure of a distinct level of quality. Because beef can vary so much in quality, it takes eight grades to span the range. The three lowest grades—USDA Utility, Cutter, and Canner—are seldom, if ever, sold as retail cuts. They go mostly into ground beef or into processed meat items such as hot dogs.

The grade most widely sold at retail is USDA Choice. It is produced in the greatest volume and retailers have found that this level of quality pleases most of their customers. Some stores, however, offer two grades—for example, Prime and Choice or Choice and Standard—so that their customers may have a choice of quality and price.

Pictured below are porterhouse steaks in each of the first five grades, together with a description of the level of quality that can be expected in each of those grades.



USDA PRIME

Prime grade beef is the ultimate in tenderness, juiciness, and flavor. It has abundant marbling—flecked of fat within the lean—which enhances both flavor and juiciness. Steaks of this grade are the best for broiling.



USDA CHOICE

Most USDA Choice steaks are good for broiling and pan-broiling, too — they will be very tender, juicy, and flavorful. Choice grade beef has slightly less marbling than Prime, but still is of very high quality.

USDA GOOD

Good grade beef often pleases thrifty shoppers because it is somewhat more lean than the higher grades. It is relatively tender, but because it has less marbling it lacks some of the juiciness and flavor of the higher grades. Some stores sell this quality of beef under a "house" brand name rather than under the USDA grade name.



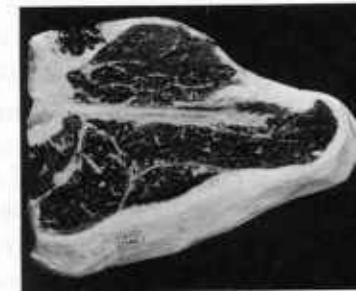
USDA STANDARD

Standard grade beef has a high proportion of lean meat and very little fat. Because it comes from young animals, beef of this grade is fairly tender. But because it lacks marbling, it is mild in flavor and most cuts will be somewhat dry unless prepared with moist heat.



USDA COMMERCIAL

Commercial grade beef is produced only from mature animals—the top four grades are restricted to young animals. It has abundant marbling (compare it with the Prime grade above), and will have the rich, full flavor characteristic of mature beef. However, Commercial grade beef requires long, slow cooking with moist heat to make it tender. When prepared in this manner it can provide delicious and economical meat dishes.



LOOK FOR THE CUT

Regardless of their quality grade, some cuts of beef are naturally more tender than others. Cuts from the less-used muscles along the back of the animal—the rib and loin sections—will always be more tender than those from the active muscles such as the shoulder (chuck), flank, and round.

The most tender cuts make up only a small proportion of the beef carcass—and they are in greatest demand. Therefore, they command a higher price than other cuts.

Names given beef cuts sometimes vary from store to store and in different parts of the country. It would be impossible to list all of the variations here. Moreover, the same name may mean different things in different parts of the country. For example, a “Delmonico” steak is cut from the ribeye in some parts of the country, while in other areas it is cut from the chuck.

Chuck cuts probably get more variation in terminology than any other. Some names “coined” for steaks cut from the chuck and used in various parts of the country include California, Western, Cheyenne, petite butter, finger, breakfast, his ‘n hers—and there are many more.

The best guide in identifying beef cuts is the standard terminology shown in the following pages and generally recognized throughout the meat industry. Many stores, fortunately, do employ these terms in identifying the meat cuts they sell. The kind of bone in a cut also helps in identifying it. The T-bone and rib bone, for example, indicate tender cuts, while a round bone, such as in the arm chuck, means a less tender cut.

Along with the illustrations on the following pages of the most widely sold and widely known steaks are suggested cooking methods for these cuts in various grades and approximate amounts you’ll need to buy per serving.

For greatest eating satisfaction, buy any steak you intend to broil at least one inch thick. For example, if you like medium-rare steak, you’ll find it difficult to achieve this degree of “doneness” with a thin steak.

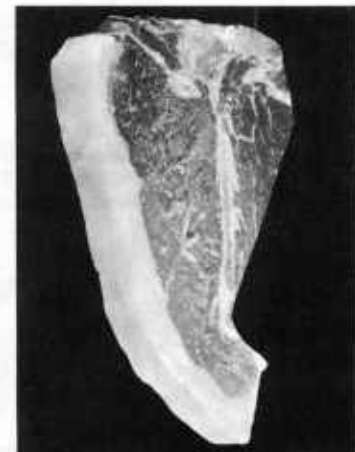
TENDERLOIN (FILET MIGNON)—The most tender of all steaks, the tenderloin has no bone and very little fat. Broil or pan-broil it in all grades. Allow about 6 to 8 ounces per person.

























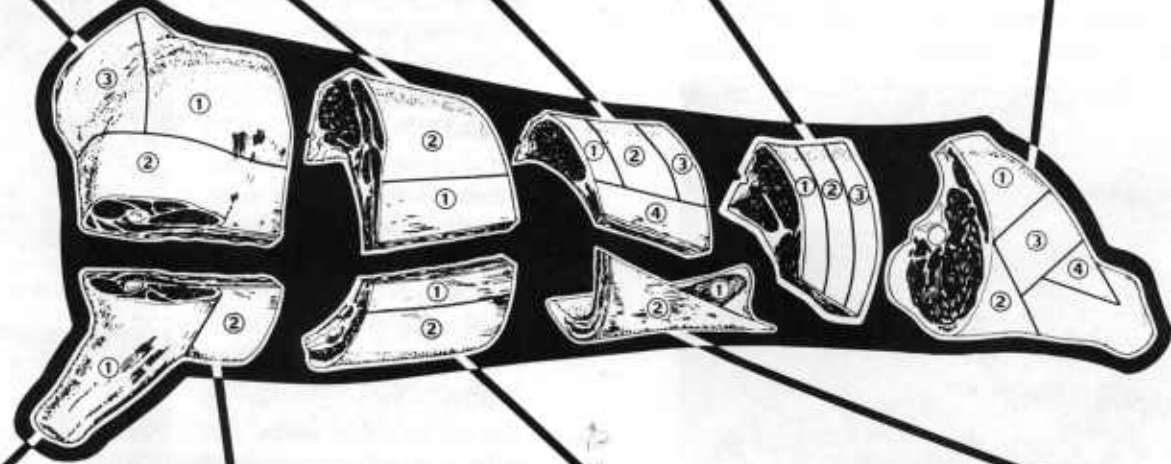






PORTERHOUSE — Often considered the best steak, the porterhouse usually sells at a higher price than other bone-in steaks. It has a generous section of tenderloin, which can be removed and served separately as filet mignon. Broil or pan-broil in Prime, Choice, and Good grades. Porterhouse is a good steak for special occasions—and for such events allow 12 to 16 ounces per person.

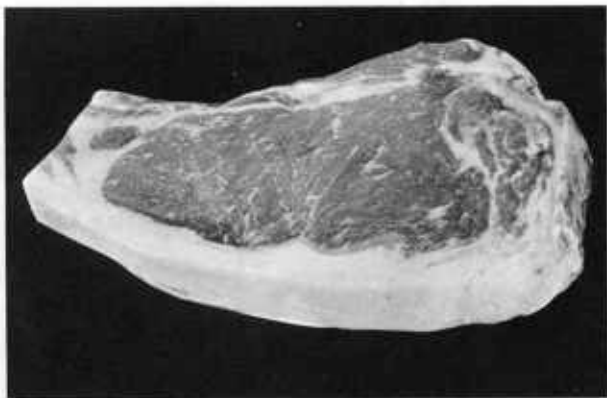


T-BONE—Very similar to the porterhouse steak, but with a smaller amount of tenderloin, the T-bone can be used in the same fashion. Broil or pan-broil it in Prime, Choice, and Good grades. For generous servings, allow 12 to 16 ounces per person.

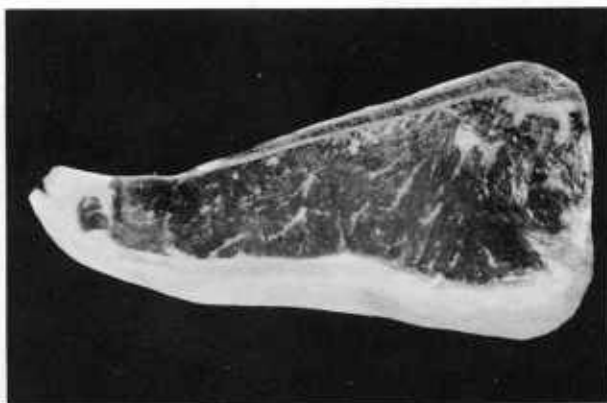


BEEF CHART

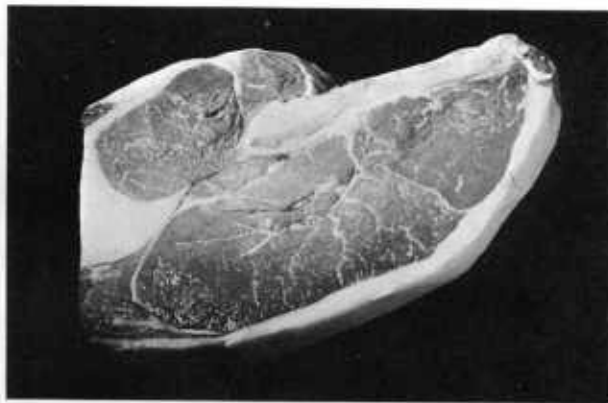
 ① Blade Pot-roast or Steak  ② Arm Pot-roast or Steak  ③ Stew Meat or Ground Meat	 ② Standing Rib Roast  ② Rib Steak  ② Rib Eye Roast or Steak ① Short Ribs	① Club Steak  ② T-Bone Steak  ③ Porterhouse Steak  ① ② ③ Strip Loin Steak  ② ③ Filet Mignon Tenderloin Steak (also from Sirloin 1,2,3)  ④ Stew Meat or Ground Meat	① Pin Bone Sirloin Steak   ② Flat Bone Sirloin Steak  ③ Wedge Bone Sirloin Steak	 ③ Round Steak  ③ Top Round Steak  ③ Bottom Round Steak  ③ Eye of Round Roast or Steak  ① Standing Rump  ② Sirloin Tip Roast  ② Sirloin Tip Steak  ④ Heel of Round
CHUCK	RIB	SHORT LOIN	LOIN END	ROUND
				
FORE SHANK	BRISKET	PLATE		FLANK
 ① Stew Meat or Ground Meat  ② Fresh Brisket		 ① Short Ribs  ② Stew Meat or Ground Meat		 ② Stew Meat or Ground Meat  ① Flank Steak



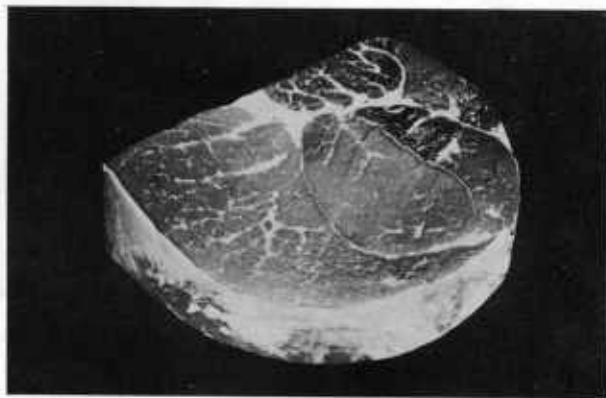
CLUB STEAK—The club steak, like the porterhouse and the T-bone, is cut from the short loin. It has the same large muscle as the porterhouse and the T-bone, but has no tenderloin. Its relatively small size makes this steak well suited to individual servings. Allow 12 to 14 ounces per person. Rib steaks are often sold as club steaks since they, too, contain the same large muscle.



STRIP LOIN STEAK—This steak is the same as the large muscle in both the porterhouse and the T-bone. It is a very flavorful, tender steak which may be broiled or pan-broiled in the Prime, Choice, and Good grades. Allow 12 to 14 ounces per person. This steak is also sold boneless—in which case, allow 10 to 12 ounces per person. The strip loin steak is often sold in restaurants as a New York Strip steak or a Kansas City steak.



SIRLOIN—The sirloin is a large steak, which makes it suitable for family or party fare. It contains several different muscles and varies in size, shape, and bone size. To get the most for your money, look for one with a small amount of bone (wedge or round bone); but for maximum tenderness, pick out a sirloin with a long, flat bone. Sirloins are frequently cut into two boneless steaks—top sirloin and bottom sirloin. The top sirloin is the better of the two. Broil or pan-broil in Prime, Choice, and Good grades; braise in lower grades. For bone-in sirloins allow 8 to 10 ounces per person depending on amount of bone.



SIRLOIN TIP—This is a boneless steak, less tender than the regular sirloin. Can be broiled or pan-broiled in Prime and Choice grades. Braise in lower grades. Allow 6 to 8 ounces per person.



RIB—This steak is cut from the rib section, and includes the rib bone. It is sold as rib roast when cut two or more ribs thick. It has a well-developed flavor and is very tender; broil or pan-broil in Prime, Choice, and Good grades. Allow 12 to 14 ounces per person. Often called a club steak.



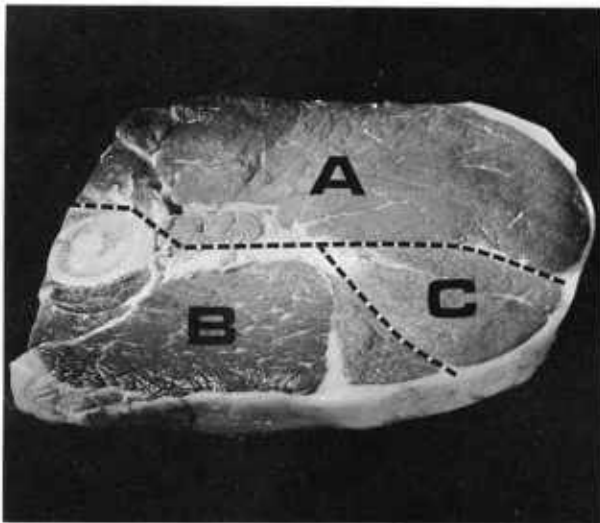
BLADE CHUCK—This is an economical steak, with a well-developed flavor, but it varies in tenderness. The “first cut” of blade chuck (shown in the picture) is the one adjacent to the rib roast and contains a sizable extension of the ribeye muscle—identified in the picture by the number “1”. In the Prime, Choice, and Good grades, this portion may be cut out and broiled—it will make a delicious and tender steak. Other sections of this cut are definitely less tender and should be cooked with moist heat (braised), as should Prime and Choice chuck steaks which are not “first cuts” and all lower grades of chuck steaks. Allow about 10 to 12 ounces per serving. Stores sometimes cut small boneless steaks from the blade chuck region and give them varied names.



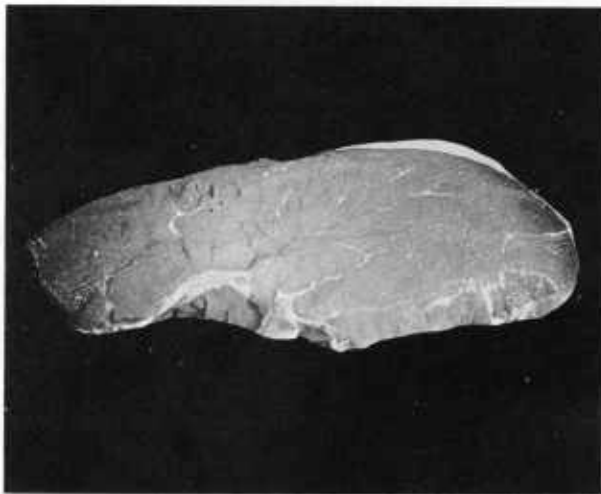
RIBEYE—Cut from the eye of beef rib, this steak is boneless, and has little fat. Like the rib steak, it has a well-developed flavor and is **very** tender. Broil or pan-broil in Prime, Choice, and Good grades. Allow 8 to 10 ounces per person. The ribeye steak is often called a Delmonico steak.



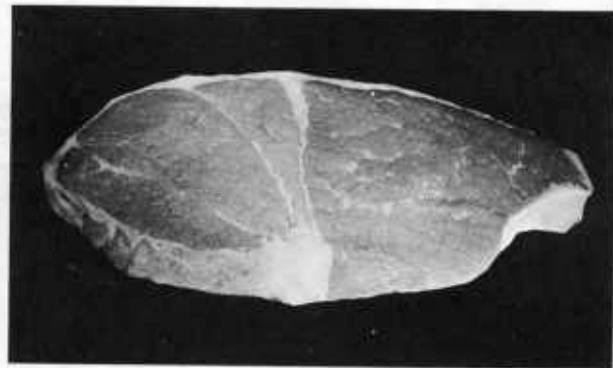
ARM CHUCK—Sold as steak in some stores, this cut is best used as Swiss steak or braised. It is definitely a less-tender cut, but it has a well-developed flavor. It can be identified by the round arm bone. It has very little waste; allow about 6 to 8 ounces per person. Also called: Arm steak.



ROUND—Because it has very little waste, the round steak is usually an economical buy. It is not as flavorful and juicy as some of the other steaks because it lacks marbling. The full round contains three muscles which vary in tenderness. It can be divided as shown.



a. top round—the tenderest of the three muscles, can be broiled or pan-broiled in Prime and Choice grades; braise the lower grades. Also called inside round.



b. bottom round—not as tender as top; cook with moist heat in all grades. Also called outside round, bottom round is often sold with the eye-of-the-round attached.

c. eye-of-round — also a less tender cut, but when sliced thin, Prime and Choice grades can be pan-broiled; cook with moist heat in other grades. Allow about 6 to 8 ounces per person for any of these round steaks.



FLANK—Boneless steak, with very little fat. Definitely a less-tender cut, but it has a well-developed flavor. Braise, cook with moist heat, in any grade. Allow 6 to 8 ounces per person. Many restaurants list flank steak on the menu as "London Broil."

USDA Grades Help You Choose BEEF STEAKS

LOOK FOR THE GRADE

USDA
PRIME

- **U.S. Prime**—Highest quality, most tender, juicy, flavorful

USDA
CHOICE

- **U.S. Choice**—Most popular quality, very tender, juicy, flavorful

- **U.S. Good**—Lean, fairly tender, not as juicy and flavorful

LOOK FOR THE CUT

USDA
GOOD

- **Most tender**—rib steaks, tenderloin, porterhouse, T-bone, strip loin, club, sirloin steaks.

- **Moderately tender**—blade chuck, round steaks

- **Least tender**—arm chuck, flank steaks



GPO : 1968 O—288-517

For sale by the Superintendent of Documents,
U.S. Government Printing Office, Washington, D.C.
20402 - Price 10 cents



CONSUMER AND MARKETING SERVICE
HOME AND GARDEN BULLETIN NO. 145
February 1968